

Chapter 2 Our Modern Royal Family

As a little girl, Elizabeth didn't know that one day she would be queen. Her grandfather was King George V. But George and his wife Mary had six children. Their oldest son, the handsome and popular Edward, was the next in line to be king. Elizabeth's father, Albert, was only the second child, born in 1895.

When they were boys, Edward and Albert were often unhappy. The children only saw their parents for an hour every day. Their nurse was a hard woman and often hurt Edward. George V was a good king, but not a very kind father. 'I was frightened of my father, and my children are going to be frightened of me!' he said.

Albert, or 'Bertie', was shy, and the family made this worse for him. He wrote naturally with his left hand, but he was told to use his right hand. He also had a speech problem. He couldn't always say the words that he wanted to say. His father only laughed at his son. Later, he had help from a special teacher, but all his life it was hard for Bertie to make speeches.

The name of the royal family was now 'Windsor'. They changed their name in 1917, during the First World War with Germany. Their family names at that time were German, and it was better to have an English one. So George chose the name

'Windsor'. Windsor Castle is one of the old palaces where the royal family often stay.

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Old King George died in 1936. Now Edward was ready to take his place as King Edward VIII. Most people in the country liked Edward, and they wanted him to be king. But they didn't know much about his private life. Even his father was worried about Edward before he died. Edward loved a good time. He enjoyed women, drank a lot, spent money, and didn't think about other people or his duties to the country.

Finally, he fell in love with an American woman, Wallis Simpson. He wanted to marry her, but Wallis was divorced – twice. The royal family didn't like her, but the problem was even more serious. The British king also had to be the head of the Church of England, and the Church did not accept divorce. How could Edward marry a divorced woman and still be king?

They called 1936 'The Year of the Three Kings'. George died in January. When they carried his body through the streets, a piece of the royal crown fell off into the road. 'That's very bad luck,' people said. 'Something terrible is going to happen.'

Then Edward became king. At first, he hoped that he could marry Wallis and also be king. He wanted the people of the country to accept this. But they didn't. They didn't want Wallis to be their queen. So on 10 December 1936, Edward signed the official papers which ended his rule as king. He made a speech to the nation on the radio. And on 11 December, his younger brother, Bertie, took his place.

Bertie decided to take a new name – George, like his father – and so he became King George VI. He had no sons, so his oldest daughter, Elizabeth, was now the next in line. She was ten, and her sister, Margaret, was six.

Edward married Wallis Simpson, and they lived in Paris for



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most of their lives. They were never friendly with the royal family again. Edward was very angry about what happened. It was a sad story, and in some ways a romantic one. But Edward was a weak man who wanted power and money. And Wallis was a difficult woman who ruled Edward's life.

The year 1936 wasn't easy for Britain, but at the end of it the country got a popular and a sensible king. They also had a fine queen, and two beautiful little princesses. King George VI's wife was a Scottish woman, Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon. When he fell in love with her, she didn't accept him at first. Even in those days, she knew that a life in the royal family is not all magic and fun. The 'royals' have to work very hard at their duties; it is difficult for them to have a private life. But Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon was a happy, strong-minded girl. When she agreed to marry him, she

accepted the 'job' gladly. Later, after her husband's death, she became the Queen Mother.



The Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret grew up in a warm, loving home. 'Us four,' her father called his little family. Before he was king, they lived in a large house on Piccadilly, a famous street in the centre of London. It wasn't a palace, but it was big enough. It had twenty-five bedrooms, a library, and a room for dances and parties! Sadly, it is not there now – a bomb destroyed it in the war.

The girls had their own private teacher, Miss Crawford, a Scottish woman. 'Crawfie' gave them their lessons at home every morning, and in the afternoons Margaret and Elizabeth also studied dancing, art and music. The girls had a happy life, but they didn't know much about the lives of ordinary people. They did have friends, but these were usually from other rich and important families. Once they went on the underground train in London, and this was a great adventure!

When she was small, Elizabeth tried to say her own name. It came out as 'Lilibet'. Since that time, her family have often called her Lilibet. Elizabeth was always a serious little girl. She liked to be tidy. She tried to put her clothes and her shoes very tidily by her bed each night; then she sometimes got out of bed in the night and made them even tidier. Margaret was wilder and funnier than her sister. Both girls loved horses from an early age, and they played with 'horses' every night in their bedrooms – not real ones, of course! Elizabeth liked to 'drive' her horses when she was sitting up in bed.

'I usually go once or twice round the park before I go to sleep,' Elizabeth once told Crawfie seriously.

The girls were popular in public even before their father was king. Little Elizabeth knew that she already had an important job.



The Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret.

Once she went out into the town with her grandmother, Queen Mary, to listen to some music. Elizabeth couldn't sit quietly that evening.

'Let's go home now,' said her grandmother.

'Oh no,' said Elizabeth. 'We can't leave before the end. Think of all the people outside who are waiting to see us!'

She often tried to teach Margaret her duties too. Once, before a party for important visitors, she said to her sister, 'If you see someone with a funny hat, Margaret, you must *not* point at it and laugh.'

Two things changed their lives. The first was the day that their father became King George VI. The second was World War Two (1939–1945).

King George was crowned on 12 May 1937. He was already king, but the ceremony to crown him was held later. It was on the same date that they planned to crown his older brother, Edward. They had to hurry to get everything ready in time. They had to change Edward's picture on the cups and other presents, and make special clothes for George and his wife.

On the great day, the little princesses wore long dresses and silver shoes. Their grandmother, Queen Mary, wore a dress with gold flowers, and they drove with her by horse and carriage to Westminster Abbey for the ceremony.

The family moved into Buckingham Palace, and they spent time at the other royal houses and palaces. They still use a number of different homes today. Much of the summer is spent at Balmoral in Scotland. They are at Sandringham, in Norfolk, for Christmas, and they spend many weekends closer to London at Windsor Castle. When the war came, the two girls lived at Windsor most of the time. Bombs were falling on London, so it was too dangerous to stay there. Their parents usually slept at Windsor, but they went back to London and Buckingham Palace each day. They felt that it was their duty to be with their people.

In parts of London, people's homes were destroyed when the bombs fell. The bombing was very bad in the 'East End'. The King and Queen often visited places like this. They also visited factories where workers were making machines and other equipment for the war. Like other women, the Queen helped to make socks for the soldiers. One day, a bomb fell on Buckingham Palace and destroyed a part of it. Luckily, nobody was hurt. But the King and Queen were glad that they were in the same danger as other Londoners.

'Now I feel that I can look the East End in the face,' said King George.

At Windsor, the girls could be outside a lot of the time; they rode horses and exercised their dogs. Earlier, in 1933, Elizabeth was given her first Corgi – a kind of dog that has short legs and light brown hair. Corgis are still Elizabeth's favourite dogs! Of course, the girls were growing up now. They could make socks for soldiers too, and Elizabeth often had to meet important visitors. Her parents wanted to prepare her for her job as queen.

In 1947, after the war, Princess Elizabeth went with her parents on a royal visit to South Africa. This was her first visit abroad, and a very interesting one for her. But it came at a difficult time, because Britain wasn't popular with some of the South African politicians. British rule was ending in many countries, and in places like South Africa they were building their own governments. Later, South Africa left the group of countries called the British Commonwealth. The Commonwealth is a kind of friendly 'club', and most of the countries in it were ruled by Britain in the past. Many of these nations still accept the British king or queen as their own head of state.

The South African police were afraid of trouble. One day, when the King, the Queen and their two daughters were driving in an open car, a man ran out of the crowd towards them. He had something in his hand. Was it a gun? The Queen was frightened,

and tried to hit him with her umbrella. The police took him away, but the poor man only wanted to give Princess Elizabeth a birthday present!

Back at home in Britain, the two girls often saw friends and went to parties. But Elizabeth didn't really enjoy them. Margaret loved meeting people; Elizabeth was shy. And she didn't need to meet more handsome young men. She already knew the man who she wanted to marry. This was Prince Philip of Greece.

Elizabeth was thirteen when she first met Philip at Dartmouth, in Devon. He was in the navy there, and he was six years older than her. At that time, he was a young man, and she was still a schoolgirl. But later, they fell in love, and in the summer of 1946 they agreed to marry. Her father asked her to keep the agreement secret for a year, until she was twenty-one.

Philip's family was poor, but royal. They came from the Greek royal family, but they also had relatives in the Danish, British and Russian royal families! Things were difficult for Philip when he was a boy. His parents didn't live together, and he had to stay at school or with other family relatives around Europe. Later, he fought in the navy during the war. When Elizabeth first met him, he was a handsome young man with plenty of girlfriends.

Philip and Elizabeth got married in Westminster Abbey in November 1947. For the nation, it was a very romantic and magical wedding – the handsome, popular young prince and the serious, sweet princess. After the wedding, Elizabeth's favourite Corgi dog went with them on holiday! The next few years were very happy. Elizabeth had her first two children: a son, Charles, was born in 1948, and a daughter, Anne, in 1950. They could enjoy a life almost like other young families, because Elizabeth was not yet queen.

But in 1952, when Princess Elizabeth was on an official trip to Africa, she was brought terrible news. Her father was dead. The royal family always travel with some formal black clothes in their



Margaret often saw friends and went to parties. She loved meeting people.

suitcase. Now Elizabeth had to put these on and fly back to England for the funeral. She was very sad; she loved her father very much. Elizabeth was only twenty-five, but she was already Queen of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.



The newspapers were full of stories about the young Queen. But they also had a few stories about her sister, Margaret. When Elizabeth was crowned in Westminster Abbey, people noticed that Princess Margaret was very friendly with an older man, Peter Townsend. Peter was already married, but later he divorced his wife. Again, this was a problem for the royal family. Like King Edward before her, Margaret was in a very difficult position. Peter wanted to marry her, but in the end Margaret decided to refuse him and to keep her place in the royal family.

Old rules and modern love were making serious problems for the royal family. And it was not the first or the last fight in the family between love and duty.